

VZCZCXYZ0000  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGT #1180/01 2611920  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 171920Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6117  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE  
RHEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS GUATEMALA 001180

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EEB/TRA AND WHA/CEN, DHS PLEASE PASS TO TSA/VICTOR  
GUARDIA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [GT](#)  
SUBJECT: VP ESPADA JOINS EMBASSY'S AIRPORT SECURITY WORKING  
GROUP

REF: GUATEMALA 351

11. (SBU) Summary: Guatemala's Vice President Espada paid an unexpected visit to the August 26th meeting of the USG-GOG airport security working group. Espada highlighted the improvements made in airport security under the leadership of Director General of Civil Aviation Jose Carlos Suarez (reftel). He complimented the work of the working group, noting that it was an example of intergovernmental and bilateral coordination that other GOG entities should emulate. Each GOG agency made a short presentation regarding the projects they were working on to improve airport security and Director Carlos discussed plans for regional airport renovation and potential privatization of the country's international airports. End Summary.

12. (SBU) VP Espada attended the August meeting of the USG-GOG airport security working group and discussed the importance that Guatemala must place on improving its overall security situation as a means to increase tourism and deter nacrotrafficking. Vice Minister of Government Villagran and Chief of National Defense (Estado Mayor) Illescas joined Espada at the meeting and pledged their support to improve airport security. The working group was created by the Embassy and the Director of Civil Aviation in June 2008 to provide coordinated USG advice and support to improve physical security at airports, enhance GOG interagency coordination, provide USG-led training and capacity building, and increase information sharing between the GOG and USG. The working group is led by the Civil Aviation Directorate, and is made up of officials from the Ministry of Government and its Airports and Ports Police unit, the Directorate of Immigration, and the Tax and Customs Superintendence. USG participation is coordinated by the Political/Economic Section with engagement from the Narcotics Affairs Section, Regional Security Office, Military Group, Drug Enforcement Agency, and DHS/Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

13. (SBU) During the meeting, the Director of Immigration mentioned that the working group helped facilitate the creation of a secondary holding area for questionable inbound and outbound passengers. The process also resulted in improved GOG coordination with the airlines. The Tax and Customs Superintendence (SAT) presented its project to control merchandise and contraband in Guatemala City's La Aurora Airport and to develop a model to identify potentially problematic travelers. The SAT also discussed their successful pilot inspection of an airplane to search for illegal goods. The Airports and Port Police (DIPA) mentioned that their force was focused on identifying potential money launders, fraudulent document holders and drug couriers at the airport. DIPA stated that additional agents were required; the Embassy's Narcotic Affairs Section (NAS) was later able to successfully negotiate an increase in staffing

with the Minister of Government. During the meeting, NAS mentioned its plans to expand DIPA's presence into other regional airports and provide continued training to all DIPA agents in the coming year. U.S. Drug Enforcement Agents noted that they have trained a unit of seven vetted investigators at the airport who work closely with their DIPA counterparts.

¶4. (SBU) The meeting ended with a presentation by Civil Aviation Director Carlos regarding future plans for airport expansion throughout Guatemala. The airport in Puerto Barrios is located on the Caribbean coast and boasts a 206-meter runway that was abandoned by the military four years ago. Lack of a proper terminal, tower, and regularly scheduled service, however, have limited the ability of the airport to support the increasing number of cruise ships that arrive in the port every year. The same is the case for the San Jose airport on the Pacific Coast. The San Jose airport remains embedded on an active airforce base and requires a large investment to build a new terminal. While no funds are currently budgeted to build terminals in Puerto Barrios or San Jose, a \$2.5 million program managed by the Central American Corporation of Aerial Navigation Services (COCESNA) will install new radar, meteorological and radio equipment in the Guatemala City (La Aurora), Flores (Mundo aya), Retalhuleu, Puerto Barrios, and San Jose towns. The funds will be provided by COCESNA from fees it collects for all overflights at 19,500 feet or higher in Central America. A portion of those fees are annually distributed to each member nation.

¶5. (SBU) The regional airport renovation project would provide Guatemala with an opportunity to expand its air

service offerings to tourist sites throughout the country as well as provide increased radio and secondary radar coverage of air traffic in Guatemala. Carlos would like to add a primary radar site in Playa Grande, located in the north-center of the country along the border with Mexico. (Note: primary radar detects all airplanes, secondary radar only detects planes with transponders that have been activated.) The GOG has initiated discussions with Taiwan about potentially financing the purchase of a \$6 million primary radar system. Guatemala City has the only primary radar system in the country and the facility in Playa Grande would increase the ability of the GOG to monitor airplanes that fail to install or activate transponders along a portion of the country known for narcotics-related flights.

¶5. (SBU) Civil Aviation Director Carlos mentioned that Vice President Espada is very interested in finding an international company to run Guatemala's international airports as a concession. Currently, only the airports in Guatemala City and Flores serve international traffic, but the airports in Puerto Barrios and San Jose might be able to host international flights if renovations are funded. A number of potential investors have visited from Europe, Argentina, Korea and Mexico, but to date these visits have been exploratory in nature. The European group specifically mentioned that the cost of running La Aurora Airport in Guatemala City, especially given the high electricity rates, would not make the deal profitable even with the volume of passengers predicted to increase to 4 million in 2018. The working group expressed its desire to move forward with as many items as possible, especially dealing with secure areas, before operations could be turned over to a private entity.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The Embassy has helped spur key airport security improvements in Guatemala through the coordinated efforts of USG entities at post and visits from the TSA and FAA Representatives for the region. We look forward to the planned November TSA airport survey of La Aurora airport and the December reciprocal visit of Guatemalan aviation officials to the FAA Annual Safety Forum in Washington. Vice President Espada's participation in the August USG-GOG airport security working group meeting demonstrates the

importance the government places on the support we provide,  
especially in improving airport security. End Comment.  
McFarland